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International migration in Mexico and its statistics

Prepared by the National Institute of Statistical and Geography of Mexico

Summary

The paper discusses initiatives to improve the conceptual and methodological accuracy of migration statistics and the related information sources. It considers ways to increase coordination and collaboration among agencies in the move towards a coherent and comprehensive national system of statistics on international migration. The paper also makes similar proposals to census sources and data in the United States and in countries of Central America, to progressively establish better statistics on migration with a broader regional perspective.

The paper is presented for discussion to the Conference of European Statisticians seminar on migration statistics.

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I. Introduction

1. International migration in the world has increased substantially in recent years. The International Organization for Migration estimates that between 1965 and 2000, migration increased from 75 million to 175 million people. Today, the number of international migrants is around 232 million, equivalent to 3.2 percent of the world population (OIM, 2013:64). Migratory displacement now takes place in parallel with the accelerated process of global integration, articulating economies and people.

2. International migration is an important process in modern life and should be integrated into development policies. It has become essential to have reliable statistics about migration. However, measuring it continues to be a challenge nearly everywhere in the world. Conceptually and methodologically, it is a complex phenomenon, given its various forms, flows and cycles.

3. Mexico's international migration stands out because of its large dimensions and varied characteristics. Around 12.4 million people born in Mexico live in another country; this means that Mexico has the second biggest flow of international migrants in the world. In addition, this migration has the characteristic of concentrating itself in one destination: the United States of America. Mexicans make up around 6.8 percent of all international migrants worldwide[1]. One in ten Mexicans lives outside of their country.

4. International migration involving Mexico, in addition to a) the flow of Mexicans to the United States of America, includes: b) the immigration of foreigners to Mexico; c) the transit of foreigners-mostly Central Americans-through Mexican territory to the United States, which turns Mexico into a migrant corridor; d) the voluntary and involuntary return of Mexican migrants to Mexico; e) the voluntary and involuntary return of Central American migrants to their countries of origin, through and from Mexico; and f) the cross-border labor flows between Guatemala and Mexico and with the United States.

5. Each one of the afore-mentioned flows has its own complexity, taking into account at least three variables: its temporary cycles; its evolution through various junctures (examples include the labor market and U.S. and Mexican migration policies); and its regular or irregular forms (documented or undocumented), with the latter being the most difficult to measure and respond to.

6. For Mexico, international migration has profound relevance. Its greatest impact has been to change our definition of nation. The nation, once only seen as encompassing the country's territory, now must adapt to its cross-border reality. International migration also has transformed the life of Mexico's regions, its economy, and its social, cultural, and political dynamics. The public policies of the state and development strategies continue to adapt to the situation. Strong challenges persist involving the protection of the human rights of Mexicans abroad, as well as protecting the rights of citizens of other countries traveling through Mexico. No less important are border dynamics advancing toward a new regionalization of development both with the United States and Guatemala, with their own respective challenges. In sum, international migration has become a powerful force of social change in practically all national areas. This is not to mention that in the United States there also are similar processes of large-scale change resulting from this migratory intensity.

[1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012). Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2012)

7. Statistics about migration in Mexico have made significant advances and are able to measure the main components of the process; however, they still need greater development. A gap continues to exist between the national importance of migration on the one hand, and on the other the statistical and official record-keeping systems that still are unable to document the magnitude of the migratory processes. Also pending is the regional collaboration that needs to exist between the countries of North America and Central America, given that international migration links the entire region's economies and populations.

II. The international migration of Mexicans

8. The demand for unskilled labor in the United States has been the determining factor for migration from Mexico. Between 1900 and 1920, this movement was driven in part by the demand for workers brought about by World War I; this stage has been labeled the "Era of Enganche," with "enganche" defined as hook or indentured (Durand and Massey, 2003). A similar situation occurred 20 years later, with World War II. In 1942, the Bracero Program began. It was a labor agreement between the governments of Mexico and the United States that allowed the temporary hiring of Mexican males; those hired came from, and worked in, rural areas. The program expanded as a result of the postwar economic boom, bringing about a circular movement of nearly 5 million workers between 1942 and 1964, when the program ended.

9. Thus was established a large-scale, informal labor market sustained by large economic, social, and family networks. This migration has persisted in a context of strong economic asymmetry; for decades, the United States has been the main world power, while Mexico has continued along the lines of a developing country. One economic indicator is the wage differential between both countries. In 2012, the direct pay average in manufacturing wage was $27.15 per hour in the United States; in Mexico, the equivalent was just $4.45.[2]

10. Today, Mexican migration to the United States needs to be understood in the context of the economic integration of both countries, following the 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which also included Canada. Although the agreement did not consider a unified labor market—that continues to be off the table—the fact is that trade has created strong interdependencies: Mexico is the third--most-important commercial partner of the United States (after Canada and China), while the United States is Mexico's main source of imports and its main export market.[3] International migration and its powerful social consequences in both countries, along with the two countries' economies, have created solid bonds.

11. International migration has traditionally not been a central part of the design and instrumentation of Mexico's population and housing census; thus, its measurement from this source depends on indirect methods. This situation has improved in the last two censuses (2000 and 2010); nevertheless, migration still could have a much greater presence in the surveys. The censuses and another set of national surveys are conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, INEGI (www.inegi.org.mx).

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[2] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), http://www.bls.gov/fls/ichcc.htm#table2.2

[3] In 2012, 16.1 percent of foreign trade was with Canada, 14 percent with China, and 12.9 percent with Mexico. [United States Census Bureau, Top Trading Partners, http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/top/top1212yr.html]

12. For previous decades, indirect methods were used to calculate the number of emigrants, as they are the combination of the residual method and the book-keeping equation. The difference between the total population is calculated, at two points in time, and the increase is compared with natural population growth. This residual procedure reveals net international migration. The following estimates were made: between 260,000 and 290,000 from 1960-1970; between 1.2 million and 1.55 million from 1970-1980; between 2.1 million and 2.6 million from 1980-1990; and 1.387 million in the five-year period between 1990 and 1995 (Corona and Tuirán, 2000).

13. Beginning with the 2000 Census, a special form was incorporated to compile information about international emigration (involving 2.9 million households). This information showed the territorial dispersion of emigration. Until the 1970s, emigration had its origins in a small number of Mexican states (seven of thirty-one) known as "traditional sending regions." In the five years between 1995 and 2000, 47 percent of Mexican emigrants originated from these regions; this percentage fell to 40 percent during the 2005-2010 period (CONAPO, 2012). This shows that "non-traditional" sending regions now are the new sources of emigration.

14. Using census information, the National Population Council, CONAPO (www.conapo.gob.mx), developed an index of the intensity of migration for each state and for Mexico City (Federal District). This appears in Graph 1, which describes the main regions from which Mexicans migrate internationally.

Graph 1

States in Mexico according to their intensity of international migration, 2010

Source: Self-generated with data from the National Population Council (CONAPO).

Note: An entity showing a value of zero would have no intensity of migration at all; one showing a value of 100 would mean that each of four indicators was 100 percent. None of the federal entities met these conditions.

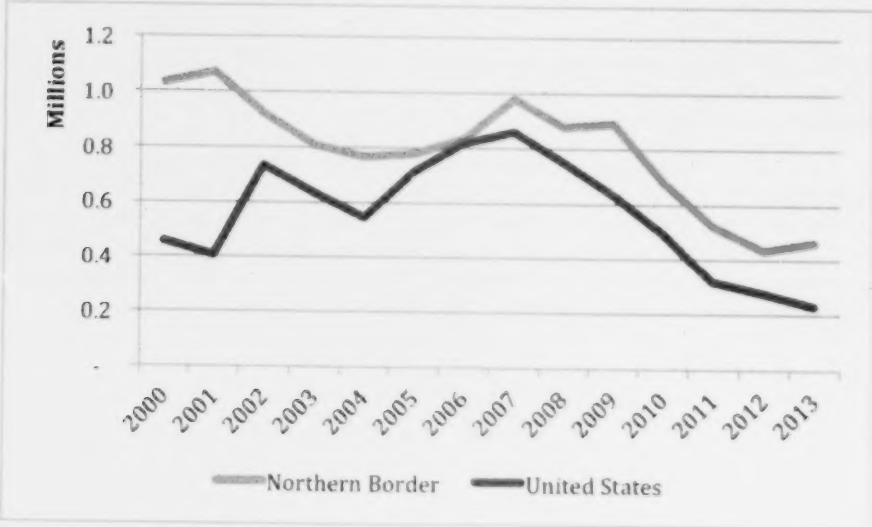
A. Surveys

15. The most specialized is the Survey on Migration at the Northern Border of Mexico (EMIF Norte), devoted to the direct study of migrant flows where they occur, and taking into account the direction of the flows.[4] This survey is unique in Mexico (and possibly in the world) because its methodology is designed to catch people in motion, including formal and informal movement. The result is a migration observatory, with quarterly statistics that include socio-demographic characteristics, migration and work trajectories, reasons for emigration, conditions of migrants' movement, the origins and destinations of the migrants, and the risks of the border crossing, among other important aspects.

16. The results show that between 2000 and 2007, the flow of migrants to the United States showed a continuing increase, only to later begin a pronounced drop, settling at a relatively stable number in 2013. Whereas in 2000 more than 450,000 migration events to the United States (with or without crossing documents) were measured, in 2007 this number grew to a little more than 850,000. In 2013, the number fell to an estimated 270,000. (Graph 2 also shows population movement to northern Mexico border-city destinations).

Graph 2

Migrant flows from the south by destination, 2000-2013



Source: EMIF Norte, flow of migrants coming from the south 2000---2013. The data for 2013 only goes through the third quarter.

[4] It began in 1993 as a joint effort between El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (College of the Northern Border, or COLEF), the Labor and Social Welfare Ministry (STPS), and the National Population Council (CONAPO) in order to provide reliable statistical information about migration between Mexico and the United States. After 2003, the National Institute of Migration (INM) and the Foreign Ministry (SRE) joined the project. Its main databases and tabulated results can be consulted at http://www.colef.mx/emif/.

17. The Migration Survey in the Northern Border (EMIF Norte) describes the dimensions of the labor market between Mexico and the United States, as well as its cycles. It is a large-scale market, built over decades, but not recognized in bilateral relations. This means that there is a large amount of informality; as a result, there are vulnerabilities of all types for the migrant population. The U.S. recession lowered demand for unskilled labor, reducing the movement of workers coming from Mexico, particularly since 2009 began. Additionally, this coincides with a period where migration policies have hardened and where barriers and walls along the border have been reinforced, additional factors inhibiting circular labor migration. More aggressive deportation policies affecting Mexicans and people from other countries also have been implemented.

18. The EMIF Norte also registers return flows, including migrants coming from the United States (voluntary returns) and those repatriated by U.S. authorities. Large-scale deportations have been part of the structure of migration. In 2000, the highest point was reached, with more than 800,000 migration events; between 2010 and 2012 the average was above 370,000. Although the volume was reduced, the situation has been more critical in recent years due to the profile of those repatriated: increasingly they are residents of the United States, with families and work and social networks formed over years.

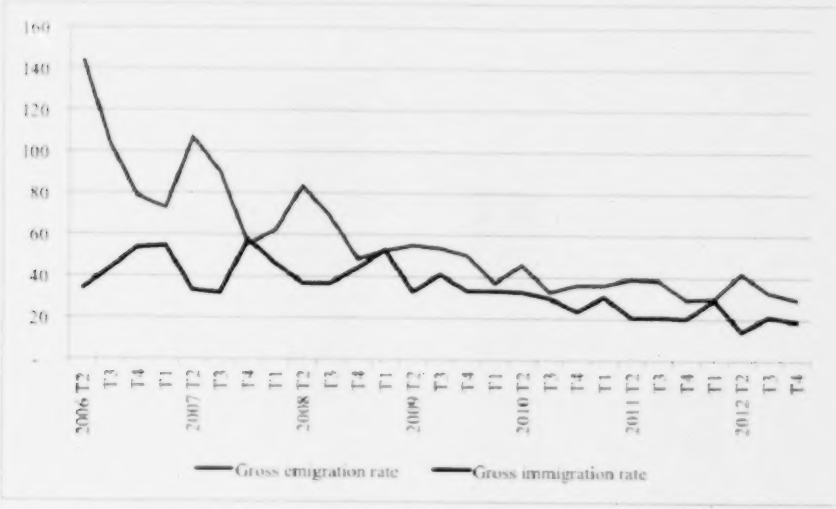
19. Until 2000, more than 80 percent of deportees were people with less than a day's stay in the United States, essentially detained upon their entry; in 2012, this number was just 15 percent. This shows that most of the recent repatriations are people who had residence there; their deportation has generated numerous cases of family separation, including fathers and mothers leaving their children in the United States, irrespective of their ages. The new policy of deportations is one of the most serious issues confronting Mexicans' international migration.

20. An additional resource to measure international migration is the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE) conducted quarterly by INEGI, conducted in households.[5] By comparing the composition of households, it is able to track the international movements of Mexicans. Results indicate that from 2006 to 2012, migration has fallen significantly: Whereas at the beginning of 2006 there were 140 migrants per 10,000 residents, in the last quarter of 2010 the figure was just a quarter of that.

[5] This information can be seen at:
http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/Proyectos/encuestas/hogares/regulares/enoe/

Graph 3

Gross rates of international migration per quarter, 2006 to 2012 (per 10,000 inhabitants)



Source: INEGI. Estimates based on the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE), 2006 to 2012.

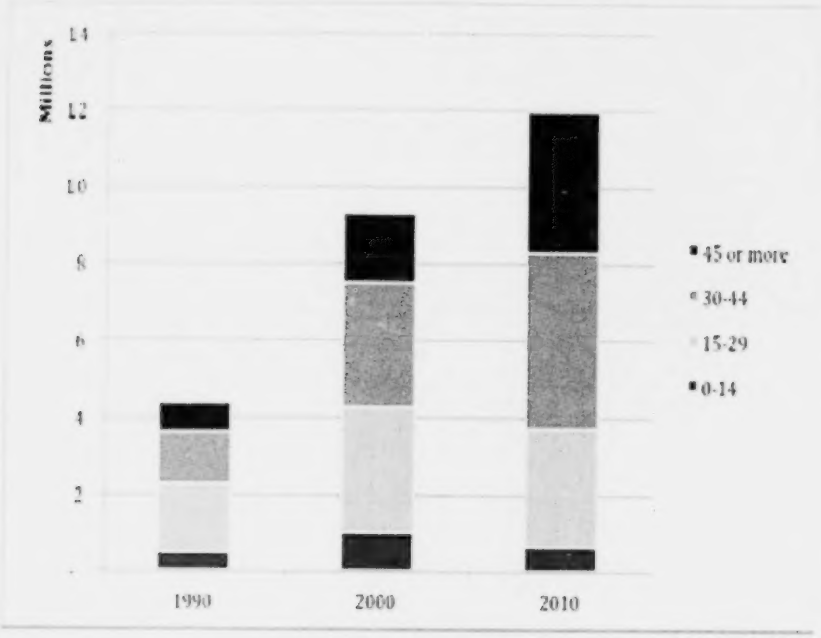
21. The ENOE also produces a migratory net balance that shows the same trajectory: The strong emigration that took place from Mexico during the 1990s until 2007 has been reduced. The net balance went from minus 110 migrants (per 10,000 residents) in 2006 to minus 10 in 2012, even showing values very close to zero during some three-month periods. The drop in the migratory net balance in recent years is the most important indicator of the current migration situation: The intense movement of Mexicans toward the United States has stopped, at least temporarily, in comparison with previous years.

B. Estimates from U.S. sources

22. The most extensive resources to measure migration from Mexico to the United States are the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the American Community Survey (ACS), of the U.S. Census Bureau. Despite the precision of both surveys, the measurement of Mexican migrants faces limitations because large numbers of them are undocumented, bringing about a large risk of underestimation (Massey, 2004:1077, Warren and Passel, 1987). In a preliminary document, INEGI estimated that the figure is underestimated by 12.5 percent. Despite this bias, the information in both surveys is excellent. Graph 4 presents ACS figures for 1990, 2000, and 2010. It shows that the Mexican population almost tripled during the period and that it is mainly composed of individuals in the economically active age cohort.

Graph 4

Mexican emigrants in the United States, according to age groups, 1990, 2000 and 2010



Source: Estimates based on the American Community Survey, 1990, 2000, and 2010

23. The Pew Hispanic Center, mainly using the referenced surveys, reported the following evolution of Mexican migration: around 1 million in 1970, 9.8 million in 2000, and 12.5 million in 2007, when the upper limit was reached. In 2012, the number was 12.4 million.

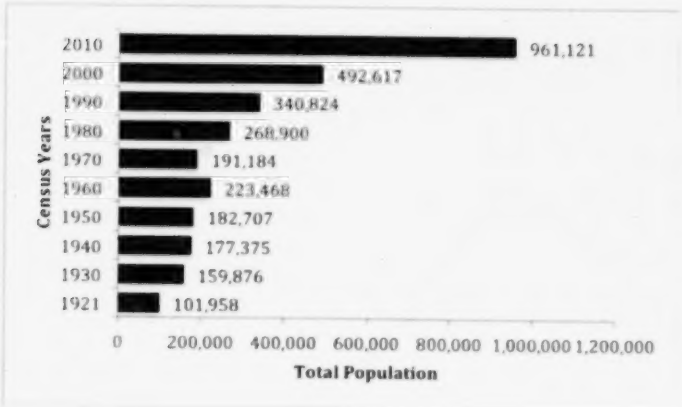
24. The sources reviewed up to this point all define Mexican migration as a large-scale process, concentrated in a relatively short period, and directed toward a single country. They agree that we are now in a period of relative stability, which seems odd following two decades of intense interchange. Net migration is tending toward zero, making it possible that the bilateral relationship could come up with a regulatory and civilized framework to define new parameters for the flow of labor.

III. International immigration in Mexico

25. The movement of foreigners into Mexico has been insignificant historically. Although its rate has grown in the last decade, particularly in the case of foreigners coming from the United States, it represents just 1 percent of the total population. It is not a relevant dynamic from a quantitative point of view, although it has some particular concentrations, such as in the northern border region. It is a migration increasingly influenced by the population of Mexican origin in the United States, and their descendants. Based on Mexican census data, it was calculated as 341,000 migrants in 1990, whereas in 2010 this number rose to 961,000, 77 percent of whom were of U.S. origin. This development and ten-year growth rates can be seen in Graph 5.

Graph 5

Foreign-born population living in Mexico, according to population censuses 1921-2010, and growth rates between censuses



C. Surveys

26. The National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (ENADID), from INEGI, includes a question about place of residence five years prior, but does not ask about birthplace. The survey questioned 575,000 international migrants returning to Mexico (ENADID 2006). This same survey, corresponding to 2009 (ENADID 2009), included birthplace, in addition to three pertinent questions: place of residence a year before; the date of return to Mexico; and place of residence five years before. ENADID 2009 thus asked 336,000 migrants coming from the United States where they had been living one year before, and 460,000 about where they had been living five years before.

IV. Transit migration through Mexico (the South-North migrant corridor)

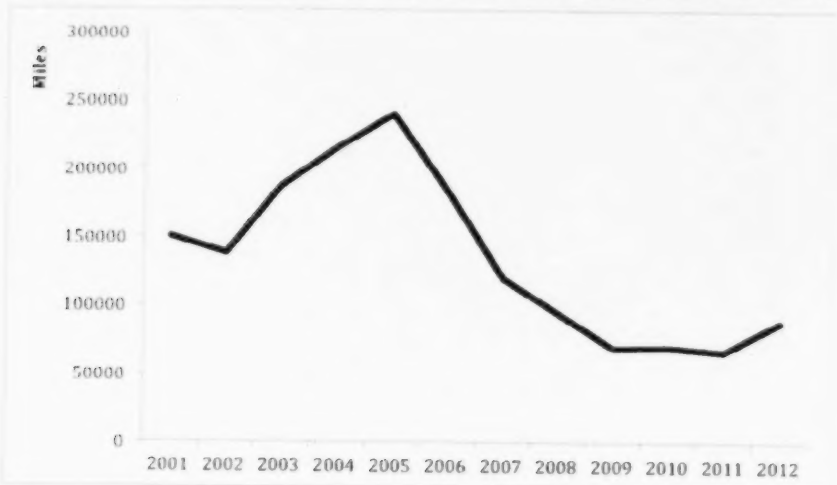
27. To estimate transit migration through Mexico is a complex task because it principally involves informal movements of people coming from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Attempts have been made to calculate this migration using National Institute of Migration (INM) records and data from the Survey on Migration at Mexico's Southern Border (EMIF Sur).[6] However, there are large gaps in the statistics. This is the flow whose level is least known, even though good information about its composition has been gathered as a result of the involuntary return of migrants. Paradoxically, this is the most-aggrieved population in terms of human rights and is a continuing object of exploitation by organized crime.

6 The EMIF Sur has the same conceptual and methodological parameters as the EMIF Norte and is devoted to measuring labor flows at the Mexico-Guatemala border and the voluntary and involuntary return of citizens to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. It came about in 2004 as an initiative of the Colegio de la Frontera Norte, the National Institute of Migration, the Labor and Social Welfare Ministry, the Foreign Ministry and the National Population Council (http://www.colef.mx/emif/).

28. Administrative records involving in-transit migrants detained and housed in INM holding centers have been used to make an indirect count of the migrant flow. The data might reflect more the kind of job migration authorities are doing than the actual numbers of migrants in transit (Rodriguez ET to. 2011:2).

Graph 6.

Migrants housed in INM migrant holding centers, 2000-2012 (number of events)

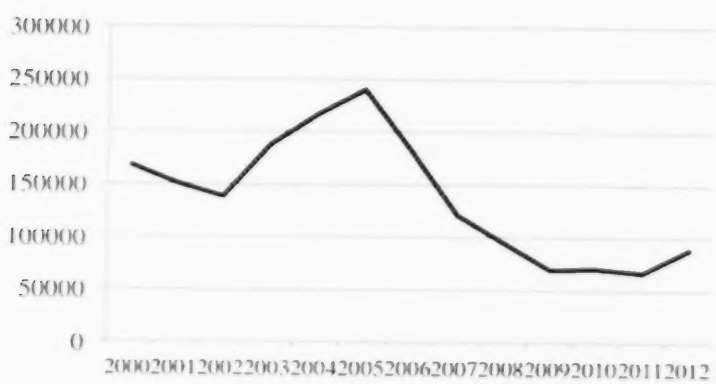


Source: Based on data from the Center for Migratory Studies (CEM---INM). Migration Policy Unit, SEGOB

29. On the other hand, the Center for Migration Studies (CMS) proposed a model—to date unique—to estimate this flow. It uses the administrative records of Mexico and the United States, as well as ACS and CPS surveys. The result is presented in Graph 7; its preparation resorted to various hypothetical scenarios.

Graph 7

Estimates of Central American Migrants (MCA) irregularly transiting through Mexico, 1995-2010

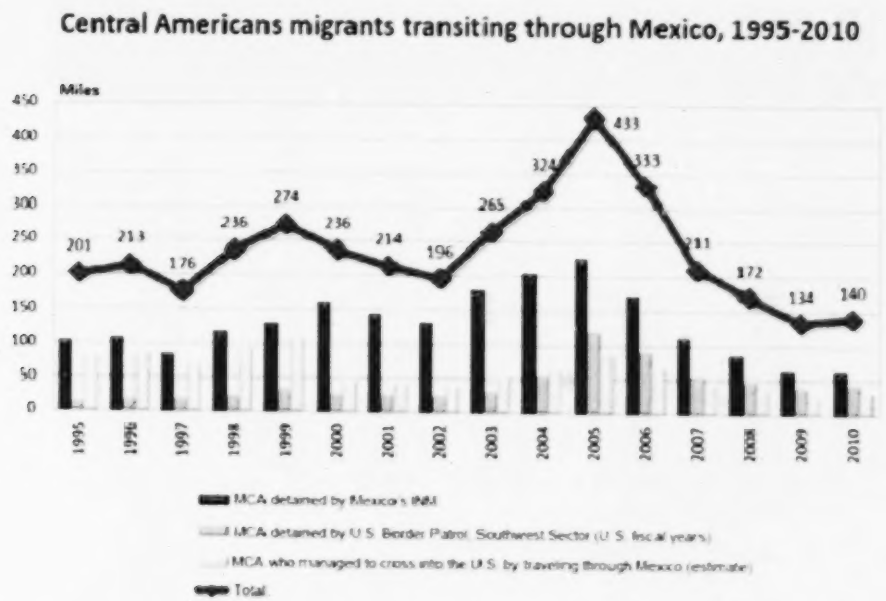


Source: Center Department of Homeland Security (Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service) and from the U.S. Border Patrol (in Rodriguez et al., 2011).

30. An additional source on the transit migration of Central Americans is EMIF Sur. The following graph only shows repatriations carried out by Mexican authorities of citizens of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, although the survey also measures deportations carried out by the United States.

Graph 8

Central American migrants headed for the U.S., returned by Mexican migration authorities, 2004-2011



Source: Based on the Survey on Migration at Mexico's Southern Border, 2004-2012

V. The cross-border workers

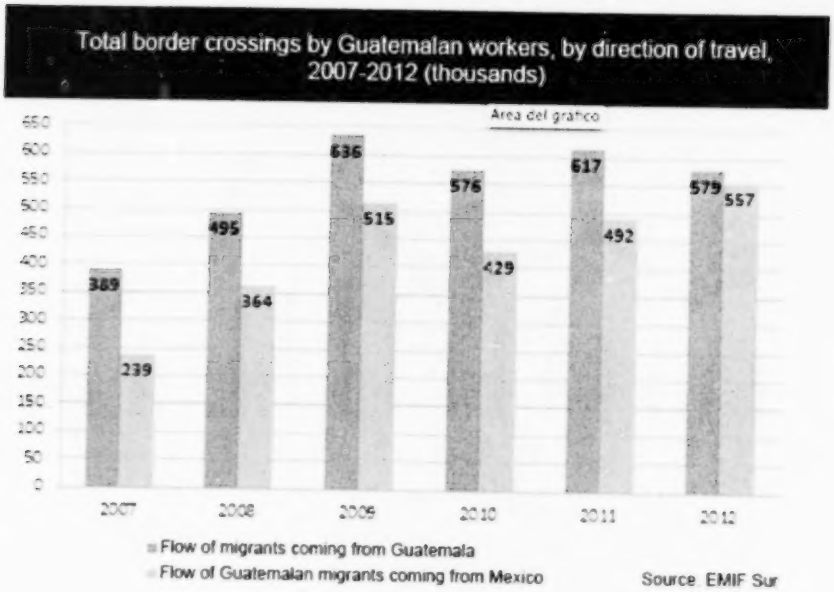
31. This migration flow is special because it passes between societies and border areas and forms part of bi-national labor, economic, and commercial networks. The people who make these daily movements have been called cross-border commuters because they must cross a border to get to their home or work (Joy, 2002). This movement takes place at both the northern and southern borders of Mexico, although in very different conditions and with very different characteristics.

32. The number of cross-border commuters in northern Mexico has been growing. In 1996, there were 28,656 of them in Tijuana, or 7.5 percent of the city's economically active population; in Ciudad Juárez there were 17,279, or 4.6% of the economically active population (Alegría, 2000). Two years later, Tijuana had 35,943 cross-border commuters, whereas in Ciudad Juárez the number fell to 15,164 (Alegría, 2002). The only source that documented the movement of these cross-border workers was the National Survey of Urban Employment (ENEU), which was conducted between 1987 and 2004. This survey was replaced by the ENOE in 2005, but it no longer included in its design the cross-border labor market; as a result, the measurement of migratory movements was further weakened.

33. At the southern border, the cross-border workers were mainly coming from Guatemala to work in Mexico's southern region; a large majority of them have papers allowing them to cross, and they increasingly have work permits. The main source of information is the EMIF Sur which observes the cross-border workers' characteristics, social profiles, details about their work, the economic sectors they work in, how long they stay in Mexico, and their various destinations, among other variables.

Graph 8

Central American migrants headed for the U.S., returned by Mexican migration authorities, 2004-2011



34. These flows have acquired a very important dimension, forming part of a bi-national region which requires greater attention to be paid to its development. At Mexico's northern border, around 850,000 migration events were recorded in 2007, the year that saw the greatest Mexican movement to the United States. At the southern border, the recorded movement of Guatemalans is around 600,000 events annually. It is worth mentioning that Guatemalan workers in the Mexican south face inadequate working conditions, including pay, social protection, and other matters.

35. An additional source of information about these links is INM record-keeping about border visitors. From 2001 to 2007 the INM distributed more than 31,000 local visitor migration forms (FMVL). Since 2009, migration policy has recognized the dimensions of these movements and record-keeping was improved; this explains the important growth of these data in recent years. There were 133,942 local border visitor permits issued in 2009, and 66,936 in 2012. Despite the drop, the records still show the intensity of this cross-border exchange and its growing formality.

VI. Conclusions

36. International migration in Mexico, as has been seen, has a number of components, some of large scale, such as the movement of Mexican workers to the United States. The determining factor—just as in other parts of the world—has been of an economic nature. It

is a huge social dynamic that has a positive impact on both countries' development, but one that falls outside of the institutional framework. For Mexico, for example, the clearest benefit is remittances, which total more than $20 billion annually; for the United States, it is to have access to workers who generate wealth in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and services.

37. To a great extent, migration continues to be informal, imposing costs such as having

to make high-risk border crossings. Between 1998 and 2012, 5,595 people died during

attempts to provide more income to their families (NFAP, 2013). With the hardening of the border and its barricade of walls and security systems, deaths have increased even though the flow has diminished (there were 477 deaths in 2012).

38. To a great extent, the dynamic of migration flows is the result of the labor market and its own dynamic. Migration policies and security systems that try to regulate (or prevent) migration are "external factors" that no doubt alter the flows, but only in a secondary manner. Or, they generate other flows that can exact severe human costs, such as repatriations, especially when they cause the separation of families.

39. On the other hand, Mexico has become a corridor for the migration of Central Americans who also go to the United States. They also face high-risk conditions in their transit through Mexico, in addition to the risks of crossing the border into their country of destination. Mexican regulations on migration have not completely adjusted to this reality; as a result, irregularity remains a common characteristic of these movements.

40. At this juncture, we find ourselves before an international migration unregistered in the formal frameworks of the states involved: While it is marginally included, it is predominantly excluded. Ideally, the United States, Mexico, Canada and the countries of Central America would come to a regional agreement, as much to regulate and to formalize this labor market as to promote policies of development to reduce asymmetries.

41. These national inequalities must be reduced in order to develop lasting alternatives to international migration and its current conditions.

42. The measurement of migratory dynamics is a complex task, in some aspects impossible to measure, given the large informal component of migrants' movements. Records concerning the origins, travel courses, and destinations of the migrants' movements are insufficient.

43. Although general measurements can be made, large gaps remain, particularly when policy requires identifying social needs at the level of specific groups and individuals. In view of this situation—and recognizing that the nation-states will not be making important changes in the short term— ideally their statistical and administrative-records systems should agree to the creation of a joint "observatory" of the widest possible scope to oversee an information-gathering system to measure migratory flows and social conditions in the most precise way possible.

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